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TUTU, IN NEW YORK,
SOUNDS HOPE-FILLED NOTE

NEW YORK -- Convincing both oppressors and oppressed that "they are of infinite value in the sight of God" is the task of the Church in South Africa, Bishop Desmond Tutu told a New York congregation in mid-March.

Tutu, secretary-general of the South Africa Council of Churches, is in the States to receive a prize from the Onassis Foundation honoring his struggle against racism in southern Africa. He preached at a service of Evensong at the Church of the Intercession in New York, a service which had been organized as a sign of solidarity with the black people of South Africa.

This was Tutu's first trip abroad since an international clamor led the racist Pretoria regime to restore his passport and he told the large, racially-mixed congregation that "It is good to be out of South Africa for a while, away from the claustrophobia of oppression and breathing free air. It is good to be treated as what you are, a human being made in the image of God."

He noted that "when a victim of oppression is constantly treated as of little account . . . you begin to wonder if your oppressors are not right when they say you are inferior." He called the apartheid system of institutionalized racism "Blasphemy because it makes a child of God doubt that he is a child of God."

Tutu cited the Afrikaans habit of banning what is considered subversive material and added that they were already too late. "They should have banned the Bible because that is the most subversive book. It says that each of us is of infinite value as created in the image of God. . .with the Bible we are able to tell the victims of the most vicious system since Nazism that they are of infinite value before God."

That, he said, is the message that must be heard by black and white. "Our struggle is as much to free the oppressor as the oppressed. If whites can accept that they are of infinite value before God, they won't want to behave like bullies." He added in a challenge to all his listeners: "You are a child of God. Behave like one."

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